

Visiting Hours

by Calliope Monsoon

Category: Forever Knight
Language: English
Status: In-Progress
Published: 1999-03-15 09:00:00
Updated: 1999-03-15 09:00:00
Packaged: 2016-04-27 09:38:34
Rating: K+
Chapters: 1
Words: 2,608
Publisher: www.fanfiction.net
Summary: A man holds a lonely vigil over a hospital patient.
Post-LK.

Visiting Hours

Visiting Hours

Visiting Hours

Tonight, he'd stay an hour or so. He would just sit with her for a while, then go home to his wife. Easing himself down in the chair next to her bed, he groaned softly; his tired muscles protested until he shifted around enough to find a position that his back and neck both found acceptable. "Too many late nights," he muttered absently to himself as he reached over and took her hand, paper white and limp as always. "You know all about that, don't you?" he asked, as his thumb lightly caressed her knuckles. He couldn't remember when he'd started talking to her. It had just happened, and now the silence of the room seemed unnatural when he didn't.

He talked. He told her about the new cases they were working on, about the mild skirmishes between partners that littered his days and nights. He described the criminals they'd apprehended during the week, and the witnesses who helped them do it. He told her about the men, women and children who had been silenced forever by the people it was his job to catch. Talking somehow made it all seem better. And he knew that she would want to know.

A nurse came by, stepping quietly into the room to check the chart and take her pulse and temperature. Then she left, with a quick smile in his direction. He recognized her, though he didn't know her name. He knew everyone here by sight and they all knew him, all quietly indulged his late night visits to "that poor woman in 208." She pulled the door shut after her, giving them some privacy.

They didn't have to tell him he was Natalie's only visitor. He could see it in their faces.

Joe tightened his fingers around hers for a moment, and sighed. "That new guy, Morris, the one they replaced you with? He's a joke. Me and half the other captains on the force want him out as soon as possible. Guy cuts and files his reports as quickly as possible, then it's 'outa sight, outa mind.' He doesn't care. He's just collecting a paycheck, waitin' for that one case that'll make him famous." He paused and looked down at her quiet, still face. "That's something we could never say about you. It was never just a paycheck to you." Joe leaned back a little more in the chair. "I tried to tell him about you," he added with a small shrug. "How good you are, how hard you work..."

His throat felt tight, and he blinked, taking a deep, calming breath. Suddenly he couldn't bear to look at her, so still and quiet; so he lifted his eyes quickly to the ceiling, then turned his head and glanced over toward the door.

He hadn't heard her enter, hadn't felt the faintest stirring of air that would have alerted him to the presence of someone else in the room. But she stood there now regarding Natalie with the most solemn expression he'd ever seen on anyone's face.

Joe rose, and the woman glanced up at him, then stepped forward into the small pool of light given off by the lamp over Natalie's bed. "You're Knight's friend," he said, recognizing her immediately. "The nightclub owner." It had been several years and he'd only seen her once, but you didn't forget a woman who looked like her. Ever.

She nodded tentatively. "I did own a club here, yes. My name is Janette de Brabant."

"Do you know where Knight is?" He tried hard to keep the edge out of his voice.

Janette closed her eyes at that, and after a moment, shook her head. "I do not."

"I'm going to have to ask you to come down to the station with me," he began. "We have a lot of questions about Knight that I have a feeling you can answer." But he knew it was useless even before he said it. The mysteries surrounding Knight and his disappearance were better left alone, and the sudden flash of defiance in Janette's eyes only confirmed his suspicions. But he had to try, even if he only got one or two answers for himself.

She didn't respond to that, only nodded her head at Natalie. "What happened?"

"It's a long story."

"I have time," she said, the barest traces of a smile touching her lips, though he noted that it never reached her eyes.

With a sigh, Joe walked over and pulled the second chair next to his, facing the bed at a slight angle. "Please, have a seat, Ms. de Brabant. "

She walked over; instead of sitting down immediately, she lingered by Natalie's bedside, looking down. Then she reached out and gently

turned Natalie's head to the side. He noted her composed and neutral expression as she examined the two scars on Natalie's neck for several long moments.

"Those were the only wounds," Joe said, breaking the silence. He indicated the chair once again with his hand, then resumed his own seat once Janette was comfortable. Absently, he reached over and picked up Natalie's hand, giving it another reassuring squeeze as he began.

"It happened about eight months ago. It was like the whole world went to hell all in one night. I remember, I was just on my way home." He smiled at the memory. "It was my wife's birthday. I was going to surprise her by coming home early. A perp up at the 96 got loose, got hold of a gun. Before anyone knew what happened, he'd shot and killed Tracy Vetter."

"Nick's partner," Janette said softly.

Joe nodded slowly. "Normally I would've waited and just sent my condolences later, but with Schanke and Amanda Cohen having just died... Well, I thought it might not be a bad idea to stop by, see how Knight was doing, even though he wasn't one of my detectives anymore. I still like the guy, even if he is a bit strange."

That earned a small smile out of Janette.

"His captain was Joe Reese. I like Reese, but the guy doesn't know how to team people up. Knight and Vetter?" He shook his head slowly. "Too much alike. Loners, arrogant." He paused at that, and glanced over at Janette. "If you have a good partnership, you give them their heads. Nick and Schanke? I gave them a lot of rope, didn't ask a whole lot of questions about how they were getting things done. They were a good team. They got the job done. I tried not to wonder too much about the things the perps said they'd seen when Knight arrested them. Like, he'd come out of nowhere, or saw and heard things he couldn't have." He looking over at Janette as he spoke. "There was even one guy who swore Knight had flown after him. And another who said Knight was some kind of monster with big fangs and glowing green eyes."

There was that careful, neutral expression on her face again. "What happened the night Tracy Vetter died?" was all she said.

He was disappointed. He'd been hoping for some reaction out of her, something. But he realized that well-schooled expression told him she'd dealt with, or rather avoided, these same kinds of questions many times before. The fact that she hadn't reacted was information in and of itself.

"The night Vetter died," he repeated, nodding his head. "I swung by Knight's place on my way home. Something was wrong; I could tell as soon as I went to the door. He's got this great big security system. Alarms, the works. It was all off. Anyone could've waltzed right into the place."

"What did you do?"

"Went in. I thought the place was empty at first. You ever walk into a place and you know it's empty, but that someone was just there, and

ran out before you got there?" He was being totally serious, and Janette slowly nodded. "That's what Knight's place felt like that night. I went up the stairs and went inside. I didn't see her at first."

He looked down at Natalie then, and shifted her hand in his. When he looked back up, Janette's attention was riveted to the still form lying in the bed next to them. "I thought she was dead at first. I called for help anyway. When they were on their way, I checked again. There was a pulse. It was barely there, and I just sat there until the ambulance came. I thought her heart would stop beating while we were waiting." Then he added, "I wondered what I was going to tell them about the marks on her neck."

Janette looked up at him then.

Falling silent, he thought about the last several months, about his lonely vigil at the hospital. Then he looked up. "Knight did this, didn't he?"

He expected nothing, expected her silence. It didn't surprise him, or even anger him.

The fact that he wasn't getting any direct answers to the questions that mattered to him became meaningless in light of the utter sorrow and pain looking out at him from behind that well-placed mask. He had his answer, but not in so many words; and as he'd known would happen, he couldn't find it in himself to hate or blame Nick Knight even though he wanted to. He'd already figured out too much on his own.

"Why are you here?" Janette asked, breaking the spell.

Joe blinked, then shrugged. "I dunno. I don't know if she's even in there anymore. The doctors tell me it doesn't look good. She'd lost too much blood. There was a lot of damage." His voice was beginning to sound gruff, even to his own ears. "She's a good person. Works harder than anyone I've ever met. She helped us put away a lot of scum. I just--" He paused and swallowed. "I just want to do right by her. I don't want her to think she's all alone."

This time Janette's smile was genuine, and she reached over to gently place her hand on his arm. That gave him the courage to continue.

"Sometimes I think that if I had it to do over again, I'd turn and walk out. Let her die. Let her find some peace."

Janette's sigh was almost imperceptible. "I'm beginning to understand why Nick liked you so much."

Joe glanced over at her sharply. "I thought that right up until you showed up." He licked his lips nervously and forced himself not to give into the urge to look away. "You haven't answered my questions, not really. But I understand a lot of things better now than I did before. I've had some things confirmed." It was as if he'd become hyper-aware of everything around him: the sound of his heart, the feel of Natalie's cool hand in his, the buzz from the light.

Drawing a deep breath, he asked, "Can you help her?"

He regretted the words almost instantly as he saw her eyes close, and he imagined that she did so to shut out a sudden wave of pain that washed over her. But the words hung in the air between them, and he couldn't take them back.

"Can you help her?"

With her eyes still closed, Janette spoke, softly. "I don't know if it would be the right thing to do."

Joe thought about giving her all the arguments, about whether or not it was better to let her lie here and rot, with tubes in her and no mind left to care. He thought about getting angry and demanding that she put right the mistake that Nick had made. Or at the very least, demanding that she tell him where Knight was, so that he could go out and make Knight face up to this. He even briefly considered trying to blackmail her.

In the end, he gave her the only argument that he knew would work. "Look at her," he said simply. "Look at her, remember who she was, and then decide for yourself if it would be the right thing or not. I'll accept your decision, whatever it is."

And he watched, as she did just as he asked. As she opened her eyes and looked over at Natalie Lambert; at the scars on her neck, at her smooth white face and thin wasted body.

"There was a time when I wouldn't have hesitated to do what you ask," she began, eyes still fixed on Natalie. "A time not so long ago when there wouldn't have been a question. But a lot has happened since then."

"Lemme guess," Joe said when she paused. "Knight...
happened."

Janette nodded. "Very perceptive. He sowed the seeds. He didn't know. Nicolas...did something. He gave me something that I told him I did not want. He told himself he was doing the right thing."

"Was he?"

"If you had asked me that right after...he gave it to me...I would have said no. Now I'm not sure. I think it will not be too much longer before I will say 'yes, he did the right thing'." There was a faraway look in Janette's eyes as she spoke. "You've caught me at a bad time."

"Then why did you come here tonight?"

Her brow furrowed. "I'm not sure. I think I hoped things were not as bad as I feared they were." This last was said with another long look at Natalie. Joe didn't want to know what she was thinking at that moment.

"Will you help her?" It was the last question he would ask her tonight.

Tears were gathering in the corners of her eyes. Joe could see them glistening there; and if some part of his mind told him they looked a

little too dark for normal tears, he quieted it by looking back down at Natalie's hand clasped in his.

Janette didn't say anything, but reached across the small space between them and took Natalie's hand from his, gripping it fiercely in her own.

He knew then that everything would be all right, that he had somehow managed to do right by Natalie. That was all he'd really wanted since that night, and every night since that he'd spent warring with himself over whether or not he'd done the right thing.

Joe had no words, no questions. He merely nodded his thanks at the woman sitting with statue-like stillness in the chair opposite him, and rose. Leaning over, he brushed the hair back from Natalie's forehead and kissed her softly. Then he straightened, and for a moment placed his large, rough hand over the joined hands of the two women.

Those all-too-familiar faces behind the desk glanced up at him as he walked down the hallway to the elevator. They smiled, and said they'd see him tomorrow evening. Joe just smiled back at them and thought about his wife's birthday. It was only a few months away.

The End

End
file.